DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 346 735 FL 020 456

AUTHOR Schutte, Lilith
TITLE The Use of Business Case Studies in Business German Classes.
PUB DATE 91
NOTE 7p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Eastern Michigan University Conference on Languages and Communication for World Business in the Professions (Ypsilanti, MI, April 3-5, 1991).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Business Administration Education; *Business Communication; *Case Studies; Class Activities; *German; Higher Education; *International Communication; *Second Language Learning; Student Participation; Vocabulary

ABSTRACT

The use of business case studies, defined as sophisticated models that present practical business problems and theoretical guidelines that can be used to solve the problems, is discussed. It is suggested that the main advantages of case studies are that they are usually more interesting to read than theoretical materials and they encourage student participation. The cases are useful supplements to available business German texts. They are helpful in preparing students to pass objective business language examinations such as the German Business Certificate Test. Two sets of cases are cited that were developed for the third or fourth year level of language proficiency, one based on a series of articles in a monthly German business journal, and the other comprised of a series of connected cases that are related to the steps necessary to set up a new company. Among the topics covered in the cases are the following: flexible working time; changes in corporate culture; corporate takeovers; global management; product development; sales and distribution; personnel planning and hiring. It is concluded that the case study materials are an ideal way to introduce business and management topics and vocabulary, to facilitate speaking and interaction in class, and to provide interesting readings and points of discussion. (LB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Geoffrey Voght
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Lilith Schutte
American Graduate School of International Management

ED 407 435

The Use of Business Case Studies in Business German Classes

I would like to begin my presentation with a short definition of "case studies" which are widely used in business classes today. These case studies are sophisticated models that present, often in a lively fashion, practical business problems and some theoretical guidelines that can be used to solve the problems. Business students usually work in groups to find solutions for the stated problems which can touch on all areas of business, such as finance, accounting or management.

For teachers of business, the pedagogical value of case studies lies in the fact that they are practice oriented, teach students to identify problems and find solutions in a team environment that encourages participation by all students and competition among groups.

The concept of business case studies, if not their sophisticated form and contents, can also be used successfully in business language classes. Their main advantage is: the cases are usually more interesting to read than more theoretical materials and they encourage student participation.

Of course, because of language limitations and because most students and language teachers do not have a thorough enough business background, cases for foreign language business studies must be simpler and shorter than actual business cases.

In my own teaching, I found the use of cases a useful tool to supplement available business German texts. The objectives of

FL 020 456

2 BEST COPY AVAILABLE

our business language classes, as probably of most business language classes, are twofold: we want to prepare our students for a career in business and also want to enable them to pass objective business language examinations, such as, for German business classes, the test for the Business German Certificate which is offered by the German Chamber of Commerce in cooperation with the Goethe Institute and the Carl-Duisberg Society

Career requirements and also the vocabulary needed to pass the German Business Certificate Test are heavily weighted toward business and management terms. And yet, the two most widely used textbooks for Business German, Deutsche Wirtschaftssprache für Amerikaner, by Doris Fulda Merrifield and Geschäftsdeutsch, by Gudrun Clay concentrate mainly on economic, social or political topics, as they can also be found in the often used Tatsachen über Deutschland, published by the German government for use abroad.

To fill this gap, that is to introduce business and management terms and business and management topics, case studies are ideally suited. In addition to helping achieve these two objectives, case studies also lead to livelier , more natural discussions than more general or theoretical texts. Thus they greatly increase the communicative ability of the students.

The two sets of cases that I developed are designed for the third or fourth year level of language proficiency. The first set is a collection of seven cases which are based on a series of articles out of Manager Magazin", a monthly German business journal. The second set is a series of connected case which are

related to the various steps necessary to set up a new company.

The cases based on the Manager Magazin articles cover an interesting variety of business situations. They are:

--Flexible working time

--A change of corporate culture

--Decentralization of the structure of a company

--Product development

--The take-over of a company

--Global management

--The development of a business strategy.

To give a little better understanding of the format of these cases, I would like to describe the first case, flexible working time, in some more detail. The first part of this case, as of all other cases, consists of the description of the problems of a particular company. In this instance, it is the oil company Aral which , because of high oil prices and other factors, has experienced heavy financial losses in the early eighties. Management needed to cut personnel costs and increase productivity. It was decided to lay off more than 2200 workers. Since the remaining employees had to worker harder, management decided to offer flexible working hours to offset the more difficult working conditions.

While the first part of each case describes a difficult situation, the second part describes the solution which this particular company found. In the case of the Aral oil company, it is being described how representatives from various decision-making

bodies within the company, that is from management, workers councils and personnel departments, get together to discuss possible flextime models. The various possibilities for the design of flexible working hours are listed , and then it is being shown, why the oil company decides on one particular model.

In part 3 of each case, I discuss some general considerations concerning the topic in question. In the case of flexible working time, some general factors are explained that make flexible working hours necessary for companies, such as: the coming 35-hour work week, the need to balance periods of over- and under-capacity without having to hire or lay off workers, and the better utilization of office and factory space.

Part 4 of each case presents discussion questions and instructions for a role play. Important business terms are underlined and translated after each case. Students are encouraged to use these terms in their prepared discussions and in the role play.

Although the cases are fairly difficult to read, students can easily grasp the main issues. By having specific assignments for role plays and discussions, students can prepare for class participation through cursory reading and then concentrating on discussion questions and role play.

The second set of cases which I am using leads students through various business areas that are important for the founding of a new company. The areas covered are:

The search for a location;

Requirements for office or factory space;

Plant and equipment;

Purchasing of merchandise;

Sales and distribution;

Service;

Insurance;

Structure and organization of a company;

Financing of a company;

Personnel planning and hiring;

Settling of accounts;

Accounting and taxes;

Internal controls;

Advertising.

The pedagogical approach for these cases differs from the first set. For each of these 14 areas there is a one page outline of important points that need to be observed. This is followed by tables, statistics, authentic materials and lots of vocabulary relating to each particular section. Examples for authentic materials are advertisings, balance sheets, employment contracts, tax forms, business letters and memos, work regulations, strategic planning documents and so on.

Each section is accompanied by very specific instructions for a role play in which students must present the actual steps to be taken with respect to each one of the areas. In other words, the students must create their own cases with the help of the materials given to them. The class is divided into smaller groups

which have to prepare the role play together and then present it in class. The element of competition among groups helps to keep the role plays lively and imaginative. After each group has presented its role play, a general discussion of the issues follows. This second set of cases can easily be adjusted to different language proficiencies. The introductory explanations, which are based on a brochure from a German bank for people who want to found their own business make easy reading. The tables, statistics and graphs present no language problems . The authentic materials , of course, vary in language difficulty.

To summarize my experiences with these materials:

1. They are an ideal way to introduce business and management topics and vocabulary, thus supplementing general texts that concentrate more on economic, social and political topics and terms.

2. They facilitate speaking and interaction in class because the class participants solve problems together and compete in groups.

3. They provide interesting readings and points of discussion for the students because they concentrate on one topic or problem and do not try to overwhelm students with a lot of general, theoretical information that is difficult to remember and talk about.